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## Russian Society on the Eve of Emancipation

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*History generally, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied and more many-sided, more lively and "subtle" than the best parties and the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes imagine.*

—Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *Left Communism*

Alexander Herzen wrote in 1851 that the history of Russia since the reforms of Peter the Great was by and large "the history of the Russian government and the Russian nobility."<sup>1</sup> Although rhetorically phrased, Herzen's words contain a good deal of truth: "history" was still being made, in mid-nineteenth-century Russia, by a tiny group of people. All aspects of culture and politics were conditioned by the enormous gap between the two cultures of Russia: that of *obshchestvo*, or "society," and that of the *narod*, the people or peasantry.

What does the term *obshchestvo* mean?<sup>2</sup> How it was used may tell us something about the social realities of Russia in the 1850s. Although the term always had strong aristocratic connotations, it does not refer to old Muscovite society but, in its origins, to the service gentry that was created by the reforms of Peter the Great. One aspect of its meaning was close to what the French meant by *le monde* or the English by "society" in the sense of "high society." But virtually until 1917, *obshchestvo* had another



meaning—or, more properly, another sense or emphasis—for which there was no analogue in nineteenth-century France or England. The term was often employed to indicate those active in the life of the nation: men of affairs, artists, thinkers, and even rebels—provided they were not *peasant* rebels like Emel'ian Pugachëv, whose massive revolt shook the empire in the early 1770s. Thus, in a sense, there was a meritocratic element in *obshchestvo* membership, which reminds one that Peter the Great attempted, albeit not very successfully, to ensure that membership in the gentry was open to commoners of great ability. More central to the significance of *obshchestvo* is the fact that until very nearly the end of Imperial Russia a small social elite was simply assumed to be the source of all high culture, the agent of the government, the representative of the nation. The people whom one might “meet” or “receive” were the only people who did important things. Such an equation had existed in most European societies, but only in Russia did it survive unchallenged into the second half of the nineteenth century. And only in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Russia was the culture of society assumed to be non-native, that is, “Western.”

After 1860, a less class-bound term, *obshchestvennost'*, began to be used to describe the active, civic, culture-bearing element of the population. *Obshchestvennost'* coexisted with *obshchestvo* and gradually replaced it, a change that reflected the steady fragmentation of the Russian elite, the fading of aristocratic values, the increasing disjunction between birth and talent. Crucial to this process was the rise of the liberal professions and the economic decline of the Russian gentry after the Emancipation of the serfs in 1861. Alexander Herzen was born in 1812 and died in 1870; radicals of his generation were all members of *obshchestvo*; this generalization cannot be made of the oppositional figures of the next generation.

The world of Russian radicalism into the 1870s was small and closed, and for the historian who has become acclimatized to it, reading a book on French or English radicalism can be something of a shock. Russian radicals, throughout most of the nineteenth century, were largely isolated from the go-odd percent of



the country that they felt to be their natural constituency: the peasantry.\* But in Christopher Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down*, for example, the picture of seventeenth-century England that emerges is of a genuine social pyramid, with various layers and strata shading into each other—at any rate, until very near the top. Even in the seventeenth century, English radicalism might become a “popular movement” (for a time, at least) in a way that Russian radicalism did not achieve for well over two hundred years. England was not anything that might be called an “open society” in the modern sense of the term, but the amount and variety of contact and interaction between diverse social elements is—to the student of Russia—extraordinary. In Russia, serfdom and manorial agriculture provided the only real context for relations between the peasantry and *obshchestvo*.

Why this enormous gap (abyss, with its slightly melodramatic connotations, is probably the right word) between the peasants—the *narod*—and the small world of *obshchestvo*? (There were merchants, of course, and a few other odd intermediate groups, but none was either numerically or sociologically significant.) Part of the answer lies in Russia's enormous size, her poverty, and the endless series of foreign wars that attended her unification. Economic “modernization” or development did not come from below, but was sponsored by the crown, in particular during and after the reign of Peter the Great in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Agriculture and industry developed not on the basis of free labor but through increased socioeconomic exploitation of the peasantry, through serfdom. Russian military advance and economic development increased rather than diminished this abyss between the monarchy and gentry on the one hand, and the *narod* on the other. At the same time, it took on a profound cultural dimension as well. In the course of the eighteenth century, the upper echelons of Russian society be-

\*Russia's total population in 1858 was roughly seventy-four million. Jerome Blum estimates that rather more than fifty million people were either serfs or “state peasants.” See *Lord and Peasant in Russia from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (Princeton, 1961), pp. 476–77. According to the Soviet economist Pëtr Lyashchenko, the Russian population was 94.3 percent rural in 1858 and 5.7 percent urban. All but a smattering of the rural population were peasants of some kind. See *A History of the National Economy in Russia* (New York, 1949), p. 273.



came thoroughly Europeanized—in many cases coming to feel most at home in a European language (French), of which the *narod* could know nothing. To many peasants, their masters were not only their bosses but quite literally foreigners.

This division of Russia into *obshchestvo* and *narod* powerfully shaped the whole of Russian life and culture in the imperial period, and after 1860 it quickly became the major problem for activist Russian radicals. Even those who were problematical members of *obshchestvo* from the point of view of the social elite were, because of their Western culture, indubitably members from the point of view of the *narod*, and they were forced to operate almost wholly within its boundaries. Until the very end of the century, the greatest single problem that confronted Russian radicals was escaping from the charmed circle of *obshchestvo* and finding support in the *narod*.

In seeking to understand the Russian village and its history, Russian radicals turned to songs, tales, legends, and proverbs—which helps to explain their apparently disproportionate interest in ethnography. They studied the songs and tales of the peasantry in search of the imagery of spirituality (if they were Slavophiles) or revolt (if they were of a *narodnik* turn of mind). And later generations of historians have turned to those same texts to try to understand the consciousness of the peasantry—how they thought of the Tsar, for example, or how they experienced the reforms of Peter the Great.

Neither in England nor in France were the laboring classes so culturally remote or sharply demarcated from their social superiors. Nineteenth-century English radicals came from diverse social backgrounds; members of the English laboring classes were frequently found in reforming movements and radical politics. But only a tiny handful of nineteenth-century Russian radicals was from the *narod*. The most that can be said is that individual peasants or workers—and precious few of the latter until the 1890s—or small groups, on occasion, showed a certain interest in radical ideas, particularly if they could be rooted in an actual situation of unusual popular misery and given a traditional-Chris-



tian resonance. But large-scale participation of peasants and workers in radical action did not come about until the turn of the century.

Much of the failure of Russian radicals to communicate their moral outrage, their sense of social justice, and their radical programs to the Russian peasant is explicable in these historical-cultural terms. The two segments of Russian society lived by different notions of law, property, and sovereignty. They sought the assistance of different saints (though much of *obshchestvo* had given up saints by this time), and they organized their lives according to different calendars. Their joys and pleasures, except for the most basic ones, were very different. Above all, they understood each other very poorly, and largely in terms of stereotypes that had proved of limited usefulness to one side or the other.

Until the century's end—by which time Russian society was rapidly diversifying—Russian peasants and the urban lower classes were unable to distinguish between their gentry or bureaucratic tormentors (whose predatory practices formed a major part of their lives) and the idealistic young people, from the same social and cultural background, who came to them bearing socialist utopias. Time and again, the advances of the “repentant noblemen”\* were rebuffed. In Moscow and other large cities, the lower classes (egged on by the police) repeatedly broke up student demonstrations, easily persuaded that the students were demonstrating in favor of the restoration of serfdom or “against the Tsar.” When thousands of students and other educated Russians “went to the people” in the summer of 1874, their complicated message (which mingled compassion, guilt, repudiation of privilege, and revolutionary propaganda) induced incomprehension and incredulity in the villagers, who frequently ended by summoning the constable. Perhaps only in some of the few urban workers' circles organized by radicals

\*A term frequently employed in the 1870s to designate guilty members of *obshchestvo*, who were possessed by the idea that their material well-being and personal culture had been achieved at the expense of the *narod*. See James H. Billington, *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism* (Oxford, 1958), pp. 91–92, for the origins of the term.



during the 1870s did the mutual incomprehension begin to lessen. And these circles were soon broken up by the police.

Central to the mutual incomprehension of the *narod* and the radical representatives of *obshchestvo* is the vexed question of peasant monarchism. It has generally been maintained by historians (and there is ample evidence to support them) that in traditional, monarchical societies the peasantry has tended to be a "conservative" element, and that when such a society begins the complex and tortuous "modernization" process, the peasantry is likely to remain loyal to the personification of the monarchy, if not to the old regime as a whole. The discontent and hostility that peasants feel toward the existing order of things are likely to be directed against targets less exalted and nearer at hand: the local nobility, the bureaucracy, or some emergent group of bourgeois notables. Still, Charles Tilly and other scholars have shown how dangerously imprecise sweeping generalizations in this area may be.<sup>3</sup> The peasant response to violent conflict and to either revolutionary or counterrevolutionary propaganda is conditioned by many other factors: religious loyalties, conflict among local elites, concrete economic conditions—the whole web of regional and local conditions.

At first glance, Russia in the nineteenth century seems to provide a clear-cut, even dramatic confirmation of this general hypothesis about peasant conservatism and monarchism. The Russian peasant was unusually isolated from the rest of Russian society, and almost all of *obshchestvo*, with relief or regret, accepted the proposition that the peasants were loyal to their "Little Father." This is not to say that the government was not in a constant state of nerves about the solidity of peasant monarchism or that elements on the extreme Left were not almost pathetically hopeful that these peasant illusions could be done away with. Indeed, one of the crucial foundations of Russian Populism was that the peasantry's belief in the Tsar could be destroyed, whether quickly and easily, or by education and propaganda over time. The renowned anarchist Mikhail Bakuhin, who had no sense of peasant monarchism, was perhaps the most sanguine of



Russian radicals, believing that the peasantry was a "powder keg" under the old regime to which one needed only apply a match. But such notions almost never stood the test of actual contact with the inhabitants of Russian villages.

Examples abound of peasant veneration for the Tsar.\* After the Emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the belief was widespread that the Tsar had granted the peasants a "true liberty" (which meant, among other things, a thoroughgoing repartition of gentry and even state land) but that the gentry and bureaucracy had conspired to distort his message beyond recognition. This widely held belief resulted in numerous bizarre episodes: Russian peasants from northern villages left for the Crimea, for example, in the belief that the Tsar had escaped from his aristocratic captors and was seated there on a golden throne, giving "true liberty" to all those who came to him.

The notion of the "good Tsar," usually contrasted with the evil retainers surrounding him, had a very deep and broad resonance in Russian folklore. Popular legends of this type clustered in particular around Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. At first glance, this appears surprising. To any student of sixteenth-century Russia, the very idea that the peasantry should remember Ivan the Terrible kindly seems nonsensical. The endless wars of his reign, the financial exactions, the dislocations caused by his division of the realm and resettlement policies—all these gave rise to massive peasant flight, then and later, and would seem to ensure popular execration. And considering the social costs (to use a euphemistic modern term) of Peter the Great's "Westernization," the wars of *his* reign, the heavy taxation, and his brutal interference in the traditional life of Russian society, one might expect the popular memory of him, too, to be heavily negative.

But the reverse is, in fact, true. Judging by the stories that were still being told in the nineteenth century, both Ivan and Peter were regarded as having been "simple" men—"big men." They were strict, on occasion brutal, but they were just, and *above all*

\*The title of Emperor, in official use since the time of Peter the Great, points to the modern, abstract notion of the state, wholly accepted by *obshchestvo*. But the peasantry lived in a patriarchal world, headed by a Tsar, not an Emperor. *Obshchestvo* and *narod* even had different rulers!



they were generally represented as hostile to the “boyars,” meaning aristocrats in general, and friendly to the *narod*. Ivan, according to one historical tale, had been born an ordinary peasant and been made Tsar by God. Only around the cities of Novgorod and Pskov, which had felt the particular weight of Ivan’s displeasure, were the stories hostile. Elsewhere in central Russia the picture of Ivan the Terrible as a “just Tsar” seems to have remained much what an English doctor found it to be two hundred years earlier:

Juan [Ivan] in a disguise sought a lodging in a village nigh the city, none would let him in but a poor man whose wife was then in Travel, and deliver’d whilst he was there; away he went before day, and told the man he would bring him some Godfathers next day; accordingly he and many of his nobility came and gave the poor Fellow a good largess, and burned all the houses in the Village but his, exhorting them to charity, and telling them, because they refused to admit Strangers into their houses, they should be forced to seek their Fortunes, and try how good it was to lie out of doors in the Winter.

Sometimes he would associate with thieves in a disguise, and once he advised them to rob the Exchequer; for (says he) I know the way to it; but one of the Fellows up with his Fist and struck him a hearty good blow on the Face, saying, Thou Rogue, wilt thou offer to rob his Majesty who is so good to us; let us go rob such a rich *Boyar* who has cozen’d his Majesty of vast sums. At this Juan was well pleased, and at parting chang’d caps with the fellow, and bid him meet him next morning in the Duaretz (a place in the court where the Emperour used often to pass by) and there (said he) I will bring thee to a good cup of *Aquavitae* and *Mead*. The Thief came accordingly, and being discover’d by his Majesty, was call’d up, admonished to steal no more, preferr’d in the Court, and serv’d for a discoverer of Thieves.<sup>4</sup>

Peter the Great was also a “just Tsar”—ironically enough, in view of his secularization of Tsar into Emperor. His folkloric image also included highly negative elements, which originated among the Old Believers, the seventeenth-century schismatics, whose early descendants often viewed him as Antichrist, but the dominant image is favorable. While Ivan was remembered as hostile to the boyars, Peter punished anyone who wouldn’t work; he might reward either a peasant or a provincial governor if he



got the job done. Both Ivan and Peter were in a sense "democratic," but with a difference. Peter's practicality and expertise are prominent in many of the stories told about him. One anecdote may suffice as an illustration: Peter is working anonymously in a shipyard, building the first steamboat. He proposes that the vessel be named after the worker who can cut most deeply into a log with his ax. When the finished vessel is inscribed with the name PETER THE GREAT, all the workers know who their anonymous comrade is.

The bond felt by the peasantry toward the Tsar is clear in most of these legends. He is "their" man, either by blood or as revealed in his actions, and he embodies their hopes and their aspirations for a justice they seldom actually received. The Ivan stories are closer to the classic form of the "just king" idea, as embodied in the English tradition, for example, by King Richard in the Robin Hood ballads.<sup>5</sup> The stories about Peter, for obvious reasons, are more concerned with labor and building. The mood is less archaic; the social scene is more variegated, populated by a range of recognizable common people who encounter Peter on his productive travels around Russia.

Despite the enormous sufferings of the Russian peasantry, the "just king" tradition still provided a kind of support for the autocracy in the nineteenth century, and it confronted Russian radicals with their most difficult tactical problem. From the government's point of view, to be sure, peasant veneration of the "Little Father Tsar" was of limited value, since peasant sympathy did not extend to the monarch's agents or policies. Peasant monarchism provided a bulwark against most revolutionary propaganda, but it did not create a constituency for government policy in the village or countryside.

A famous and fascinating example of peasant monarchism and one kind of radical response to it was provided by the so-called Chigirin Affair of 1877.<sup>6</sup> The background of what took place was the failure of the "movement to the people," when thousands of upper-class Russians had streamed out into the countryside; hundreds of radicals and ideologically amorphous sympathizers were eventually arrested. Amid the ensuing confusion and demorali-



zation there was a general feeling that much tighter organization and more sophisticated tactics were essential. It was under these circumstances that several revolutionaries, of whom Ia. A. Stefanovich was the central figure, decided that they would exploit peasant monarchism in the interests of the revolution.

They chose, as the arena for their plans, the district of Chigirin, an impoverished area of the Ukraine where disputes about land allotments had been endemic among the recently emancipated state peasants,\* and where the poorer peasants seemed to be struggling for the equitable principles of communal redistribution of land. There had been a good many arrests, and troops had been quartered on the villages, so the ground seemed well prepared. After some preliminary contact had been made, Stefanovich brought the peasants a "Secret Imperial Charter" and something called the "Code of the Society of 'The Secret *Druzhina*.' "† Stefanovich arranged for both documents to be printed in Kiev. The gist of his message to the peasants, substantiated and elaborated in these forged materials, was that the Tsar had been unable to prevail against the wicked nobility and that his original Emancipation decree had been distorted out of recognition. The Tsar, wrote Stefanovich, had struggled against the nobility for twenty years, but it was now clear that he could not prevail against his powerful and unscrupulous adversaries without the direct assistance of his loyal subjects. The peasants were therefore instructed to organize and arm themselves, with a view to an insurrection, in the name of the Tsar, against their gentry oppressors.

The scheme was eventually betrayed from within, and many peasants, as well as their radical organizers, were arrested. But until the betrayal it did seem clear that some modest success had been achieved; something on the order of a thousand peasants had been "organized." From a practical point of view, the tactic was not devoid of merit, considering the utter failure of the

\*The state peasants were not serfs of an individual landlord but were bound to the state. On the eve of the Emancipation they were slightly more numerous than the serfs (sometimes known as "landlord's peasants"), and their economic situation was, on the whole, better.

†In medieval times, *druzhina* referred to the military retinue of a Russian prince.



“movement to the people” and the continuing disarray among the radicals. But its propriety or morality was another thing, and although Stefanovich had his defenders, no one seemed disposed to emulate him subsequently. A general belief came to prevail among Russian revolutionaries that peasant monarchism had somehow to be overcome; it could not be capitalized upon, even for the highest ends.

Recently, Daniel Field's extensive and intelligent analysis of the Chigirin Affair has called the whole idea of peasant monarchism into question. To begin with, he has shown that both the government and the peasants found “naive” peasant monarchism convenient in the aftermath of the events at Chigirin. The peasants who had been enrolled in the *druzhina* found it expedient to assert that they had been misled and their credulity exploited by an unscrupulous agitator, for otherwise they would have left themselves open to charges of conscious rebellion. The government found it expedient to believe them and therefore to make their punishment light, for otherwise it would have had to confront the notion that many peasants believed the existing order of things sufficiently unjust to warrant rebellion of a kind. Therefore, Field has concluded, it is pointless to raise the question of the *sincerity* of the peasants' convictions. That the peasants were naive monarchists was an accepted convention for discourse across the great gulf dividing *obshchestvo* from peasant Russia.

The usefulness of the “myth” of peasant monarchism is suggested by its duration. A Marxist might be inclined to argue that the Russian peasantry suffered from “false consciousness,” that their true interests lay in massive revolt. But a belief in the weakness of peasantries with respect to social and political action has been a staple conclusion among students of the subject. The geographical dispersion of peasants, their technological backwardness, and their intense localism have made anything more than spontaneous and local action unusual and difficult—without the guidance of an outside elite. As Marx put it, “they are . . . incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They



cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master." To which a later commentator adds: "the only thing to be objected to in this statement is the absoluteness of its terms, which has been refuted by later events."<sup>7</sup> The Russian radicals of the 1860s and 1870s could provide only the rudiments of such elite guidance, and the peasants were wise indeed not to deliver themselves into the hands of such as Stefanovich.

There was, moreover, another strain of peasant folklore that dovetailed curiously with the myth of the "just Tsar": the folklore of banditry and peasant insurrection.<sup>8</sup> Central here are the cycles of legends and tales that glorified the leaders of the great peasant rebellions: Stenka Razin in the seventeenth century and Pugachëv in the eighteenth. Not surprisingly, these legends were of great interest to the radical ethnographers of the 1860s and 1870s, suggesting as they did the "revolutionary potential" of the *narod*, or at least its insurrectionary capacity. But even in the Razin and Pugachëv cycles the rebel-avengers were the enemies of the boyars rather than of the Tsar. In the folklore of the *narod* there was no real opposition between the notion of the "just Tsar" and that of the peasant insurrectionary; indeed, the cossack Pugachëv represented himself as the "true Tsar," Peter III, who in fact had been murdered by his wife, Catherine the Great.

The landed elite that benefited from the labor of the *narod* was a curious, composite grouping generally known as the gentry (*dvorianstvo*, *dvorian'e*).<sup>9</sup> Neither "nobility," as the term is employed in England or France, nor "gentry," in the English sense, is really adequate to describe the Russian *dvorianstvo*, but we shall follow customary usage and call them the gentry. In the 1850s this group numbered about 500,000 persons of both sexes.<sup>10</sup> Its history is extremely intricate and confusing; some knowledge of it is vital to an understanding of the main lines of Russia's history before the revolution.

The gentry was in fact not an aristocracy in the Western European sense and certainly not a class as either Marx or most contemporary sociologists would employ the term. Medieval Russia



had an indigenous aristocracy, made up primarily of the families ruling in the various principalities absorbed by Muscovy, and the great lords who served them. The latter were known as boyars, a term that is often loosely used to indicate all of this aristocratic constellation. In Russia, as elsewhere in Europe, the consolidation of the modern state involved the subjugation of the old aristocracy by the crown. But in Russia the destruction of the old aristocracy was far more thoroughgoing than in the France of the *ancien régime* or in Prussia. What had emerged by the seventeenth century (and was consolidated by Peter the Great in the eighteenth) was a socially diverse body of men, bound by the monarchy to serve the state and receiving, in exchange, the exclusive right to own serfs. If there was a social contract in Russia prior to 1861, this was it. With characteristic brilliance, Alexander Herzen described the relationship in the following terms:

Could not the tsar say [to the gentry] "You want to be free? What's the point? Take *obrok* [quitrent] from your peasants, take their labor, take their children as servants, cut back their land, sell them, buy, resettle, beat, whip them, and if you get tired, send them to me at the police station and I will gladly whip them for you. Isn't that enough for you? You want to know honor? Our predecessors yielded you a part of our autocracy; by binding free men to you, they cut off the hem of their purple robe and threw it over the poverty of your fathers. You did not renounce it, you, too, are covered by it and live under it—so how can you and I talk of freedom? Stay bound to the tsar, so long as orthodox Christians are bound to you."<sup>11</sup>

In a more sober vein, Herzen observed acidly in his memoirs that

West European aristocracy is indeed so completely alien to us that all accounts of our *grandees* may be reduced to stories of savage luxury, of banquets in which a whole town takes part, of innumerable house-serfs, of tyrannising over the peasants and inconsiderable neighbors, together with slavish subservience before the Emperor and the Court. The Sheremetevs and the Golitsyns with all their palaces and great estates were in no way distinguished from their peasants except by wearing a German coat, reading and writing French, and enjoying wealth and the tsar's favor. They were all constantly confirming [the



Emperor] Paul's dictum, that he had no one about him but people in high positions; those, that is, to whom he spoke, and while he was speaking. All that is very good, but one ought to recognize it. . . . The habits of the Polish Pans were nasty, barbarous and now almost unintelligible; but they were of a different calibre, a different cast of personality, and there was not a shade of servility in them.<sup>12</sup>

What Herzen does not say is that the Polish aristocracy maintained its prerogatives against the crown with such brilliance that the Polish state disappeared for more than a century; still, his principal point is correct. In Russia the monarchy was far more successful in its struggle with the aristocracy than was the case in Western Europe, and the Russian gentry was more timid and more closely tied to it than were comparable groups in the West.

But one should not overdo the contrast. In Western Europe, too, aristocracies were subdued by the monarchy and often significantly bureaucratized. Large segments of the nobility were dependent upon salaries, and "noble" status might be the result of a royal grant, as in eighteenth-century France. Still, the French and English nobility profoundly affected their countries' histories by their struggles against the crown. In Russia, the struggle was far more one-sided, and "aristocratic" opposition after the early seventeenth century was largely indirect and literary, save in time of crisis, and it left behind little more than a cluster of nostalgias and snobberies among the more illustrious gentry families.\*

Peter the Great made admission to the gentry depend on service to the state, and although the *obligation* to serve did not survive the eighteenth century, the possibility of achieving noble rank through service did. Still, formidable difficulties confronted those who aspired to noble status through a career in state service. The Russian educational system was small and primitive,

\*During the so-called Time of Troubles (1605-13), and during the interregnum in 1730, aristocratic groups made serious efforts to limit the monarchy. Not only were they unsuccessful, but on neither occasion did an important oppositional tradition survive. The Decembrist Revolt of 1825 had a certain aristocratic component to it as well. But the mythology of the Decembrists, as it developed in the nineteenth century, provided historical precedent not for aristocratic frondeurs but for the intelligentsia radicalism that was to come.



even after the reforms at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and it was difficult to rise high enough in the service hierarchy to achieve hereditary nobility without more education than was readily available to most nongentry Russians. Nor did the simple and archaic structure of Russian society stimulate the kinds of ambition that one ordinarily finds in modern societies where careers open to talent are less hedged about with difficulties. And, finally, the pool from which new talent could be drawn was, relative to the Russian population as a whole, extremely small. Serfs and state peasants were, with the rarest exceptions, altogether excluded. So great was the gulf between the peasant village and *obshchestvo*, in fact, that movement from one to the other was virtually nonexistent, which meant that a cluster of special categories—like the sons of village priests or lower-ranking army officers and bureaucrats—were the only significant native source of upwardly mobile personnel.

As Peter the Great conceived them, gentry and bureaucracy were identical. But particularly after the abolition of the mandatory service obligation in 1762, the two groups grew apart. Many members of the gentry served the state only for a while, or not at all. At the same time, a hereditary bureaucratic caste began to develop, technically within the gentry, but less and less related to landed wealth and more and more to a tradition of bureaucratic service.

At the same time, the eighteenth century saw the gentry become more "aristocratic." Taking advantage of the indolence and political weakness of successive monarchs, they gradually weakened the tie between privilege and service that had been one of the linchpins of the Petrine system. In 1785 Catherine the Great confirmed the accumulation of gentry privileges, added some new ones, and granted the gentry corporate organization as an estate of the realm. Concurrently, members of Russia's "aristocracy" were now recognized as full owners of their estates; they were exempt from corporal punishment, as well as personal taxation; and, through the newly established provincial marshals of the nobility, they might petition the crown. Until the Decembrist Revolt helped swing the pendulum in the other direction,



the gentry appeared to be moving toward the achievement of genuine aristocratic status.

One cannot equate *obshchestvo* with the gentry as a whole. Many people who were technically members of the gentry were extremely poor and ill-educated, and spent their lives struggling for economic survival in out-of-the-way parts of the empire. In 1858 there were in Russia an estimated 3,633 serf owners without any land at all. These men constituted 4 percent of all serf owners, and they owned, on the average, 3 serfs apiece. Forty percent of all serf owners in Russia owned between 1 and 20 serfs.<sup>13</sup> Many of these provincial *hobereaux* could not be considered part of *obshchestvo* genealogically, culturally, or in terms of any worldly accomplishment. Some of them certainly led lives that were scarcely to be distinguished from those of the more prosperous peasantry.\* On the other hand, the nationalist historian Mikhail Pogodin was born a serf in 1800; his family was not manumitted by its owner until he was six years old; by his own industry and talent, Pogodin put himself through the University of Moscow and then had a successful career as a historian, editor, and journalist. Although his gentry friends were often caustic about what they regarded as the crudities of his character (and thus indirectly about his plebeian origins), Pogodin was considered a member of *obshchestvo*.

Finally, we should take note of the changing relationship between *obshchestvo* and the government. Under Catherine, Paul, and Alexander, the terms were not perceived as antithetical in any significant way. But from the early years of Nicholas's reign onward, *obshchestvo* and *pravitel'stvo* (government) became in various ways *opposed*—or at least sharply differentiated. This divergence had a great deal to do with the Decembrist Revolt of 1825, which led Nicholas to regard the gentry class as a whole with considerable suspicion, and particularly its more literate representatives. It also had something to do with the sharpening differentiation between bureaucracy and gentry, between those

\*And of course one should not, within the gentry, make wealth alone the criterion for membership within *obshchestvo*. A very rich but ignorant and provincial boor was unlikely to be accepted.



who governed Russia and those who created Russian culture. Under Nicholas, literary culture in particular became more and more steeped in "political" values, and the government regarded it as automatically oppositional and dangerous. The divorce between *pravitel'stvo* and *obshchestvo* was more or less accomplished in the 1860s, and with the steady democratization of Russian intellectual and cultural life that followed, the term *obshchestvo* itself became increasingly anachronistic.

The term "intelligentsia" was devised in Russia in the 1860s to refer to a group once thought to be peculiarly Russian. But the term has proved highly attractive to historians, and intelligentsias have been discovered in virtually all modern societies, European and non-European alike. Once there was only the Russian intelligentsia; now Chinese, French, and Nigerian intelligentsias have turned up. Students of Russia used to delight in asking "What is the intelligentsia?" before proceeding to a discussion of Herzen and Chernyshevsky, but the same question may now be so broad and vague as to be impossible or useless. Still, there is something to be gained by asking it, as one cannot discuss the beginnings of the Russian revolutionary movement without having an idea of what is to be understood as "the intelligentsia."<sup>14</sup>

It is easiest to begin by indicating what it is *not*. For instance, we may reject the view that an intelligentsia—in Russia or elsewhere—is simply those elements in society with access to higher education and the skills that go with it. If one adopts this extremely broad characterization, all sense of the special radical and critical orientation of the intelligentsia is dissolved and finally lost. Nor may we relate the intelligentsia in any direct way to the means of production, as some Marxists have attempted to do.

Toward the end of his great book on the nineteenth-century Chinese liberal Yen Fu, Benjamin Schwartz distinguishes two powerful influences in nineteenth-century European social thought, particularly as it was reflected in the writings of non-Western thinkers, like his subject. The first he called "the Faust-



ian-Promethean strain," which he found to be characterized by "the exaltation of energy and power both over non-human nature and within human society, involving the 'rationalization' (in the Weberian sense) of man's whole socio-economic machinery." Schwartz called his second category "the stream of social-political idealism." The latter, "represented by such terms as freedom, equality, democracy and socialism, has been concerned with the nature of relations among men within the larger macroscopic structures of political and social life and with the shaping of those structures to promote social-ethical ends."<sup>15</sup>

These two categories—which, of course, are always somewhat intermingled—define the goal of the intelligentsias that have come into existence since the philosophes led the way in eighteenth-century France. An intelligentsia is an essentially modern phenomenon, related to the process of secularization: its members perform at least some of the functions earlier fulfilled by priests or other representatives of religion. Since around 1500, first Europe and then the rest of the world have been drawn into patterns that we vaguely think of as "modern"—involving secularization, rationalization of more and more areas of human life (especially public life—let us call this "bureaucratization"), and industrialization. The forms that "modernity" has taken and is taking vary enormously,<sup>16</sup> and the social costs of modernization do, too. England and the United States are countries where the social cost of modernization has been *relatively* low; the experience has been more painful in Germany and China, while India is still not fully launched into the process.

The modernization experience is an agonizing one; and of course there is no ultimate reason why a nation need undergo it. As yet, however, no society with any degree of self-consciousness has been willing to resist the essentials of the process, whatever national or ideological coloring the modernizing elite may give to "their" modernity. This is apparently because power, if not survival, seems to depend on undergoing the tremendous upheavals attendant on drastically altering the premodern social order. As Schwartz has pointed out, two myths lie behind what he calls the power of "the West": the myth of Faust and the myth



of Prometheus.<sup>17</sup> Faust, making his pact with the Devil in order to understand the innermost secrets of nature, in order to *dominate* nature, and Prometheus, stealing fire from the gods in order to bestow it on his fellow man—these are the most important archetypes of our civilization.\*

The modernization process has not, of course, proceeded without criticism from individuals and social groups affected by it. Sometimes this criticism has been mild, sometimes bitter, sometimes violent. Sometimes it has been intended to expedite the modernization process, sometimes to change its course, sometimes to stop it entirely. Much of this criticism of modernity has come from individuals and groups that may be accurately described as intelligentsia.

But an intelligentsia's drive for "wealth and power" is not always compatible with its social idealism. In general, the less wealth and power a nation has, the more "backward" and powerless it seems to be, the more sharply its intelligentsia is likely to focus on the achievement of material power. This diminishes the stream of social idealism, though rarely dams it up entirely. Thus nineteenth-century Chinese intellectuals like Yen Fu were far more concerned with the sources of Western power than were nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals.

For all its attraction toward power, the intelligentsia's critique of modern Western civilization has at bottom been a moral one and is a derivative of the intelligentsia's sacerdotal inheritance. Although there has been considerable variety in the moral and political positions taken by *intelligenty* (to use the Russian plural, meaning "members" of the intelligentsia), their criticism can in general be classified as either "counterrevolutionary"/romantic or socialist. Clearly, if one is going to criticize the growing ratio-

\*As Herman Melville knew before Yen Fu. As he wrote in "The Bell-Tower": "A practical materialist, what Bannadonna had aimed at was to have been reached, not by logic, not by crucible, not by altars; but by plain vice-bench and hammer. In short, to solve nature, to steal into her, to intrigue beyond her, to procure someone else to bind her to his hand;—these, one and all, had not been his objects; but, asking no favors from any element or any being, of himself, to rival her, outstrip her, and rule her. He stooped to conquer. With him, common sense was theurgy; machinery, miracle; Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God." Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor, and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth, England, 1970), Penguin edition, p. 210.



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nalism, bureaucratization, and industrialization of modern times, the most natural response is either to create a model of the good society that is in jeopardy or has been lost, or to envisage a more humane and equitable form of society that might be—that ought to be—achieved in the future. It is hardly necessary to add that this kind of moral critique will be dismissed as “utopian” by the practical statesmen who have momentary charge of their nation’s destiny.

The acceptance by almost everyone who writes about these problems of such terms as “counterrevolutionary,” “romantic,” and “socialist” suggests the dominance of a Europe-centered Marxist or liberal historical framework, carrying with it strong overtones of inevitability. The romantic, “backward-looking” critique of modernity has frequently been dismissed as merely useless and nostalgic. Perhaps—if our sense of historical possibility becomes somewhat greater, as both the liberal and Marxist ideas of progress become even more problematical—our condescending attitude toward “nostalgic” or “utopian” ideas and viewpoints will change.

Naturally there are major intellectual differences between “radical” and “reactionary” intelligentsia viewpoints, particularly with respect to attitudes toward national and cultural traditions, the proper principles of social organization, the phenomenon of rationalism itself. In general, the “Left” *intelligent* has tended to see the modernization process as issuing in a socialist revolution, which would *fulfill* rationalism rather than destroy it, and would realize all the wealth-creating possibilities of modernization while eliminating the national and social inequalities it has created. The intelligentsia of the “Right,” by contrast, has tended to be programmatically hostile to the whole idea of modernization. In practice, however, Right and Left are not always easy to distinguish.

On occasion, an intelligentsia viewpoint can be related directly to the social interests of an influential social class or group. The landed aristocracies of Europe—particularly in Germany, for example—were a powerful force in the creation of a coherent structure of ideas opposed to the French Revolution and justify-



ing the social values it threatened.<sup>18</sup> Still, the "social content" of the intelligentsia's ideas, or its relationship to concrete interest groups in society, is a difficult matter, and the intellectual structures created by intelligentsia critics are not always easy to relate to the practical economic interests of social groups. We shall have occasion to see how difficult it is to do so in nineteenth-century Russia.

Despite the important differences between "radical" and "reactionary" intelligentsia viewpoints, there are some striking points of correspondence. Two ideas in particular are common to both critiques. Both "radicals" and "reactionaries" believe that the individual man in modernizing or modern society is alienated from his work and from his social and intellectual surroundings. He seems to have lost a harmonious "wholeness" in his being; his intellectual, moral, and aesthetic faculties are fragmented or at war with each other. Though radicals locate the source of alienation more specifically in economic factors—property relations, work, and so on—while reactionaries usually look to the recovery of certain traditional values, often religious, as the main thing, the problem of alienation is central to almost all intelligentsia criticism of modernity, in Russia as elsewhere.

The other influential proposition is that the large, faceless, rationalized society of modernity must be replaced by some kind of "community," whose members will be related to each other "organically," where impersonality, boredom, and compulsion will be, if not eliminated, greatly decreased. In some manifestations, the ideal of community<sup>19</sup> strongly resembles that put forward by nineteenth-century European conservatives against what they regarded as the corrosive rationalism and individualism of their time; the elements stressed being

not the abstract and impersonal relations of contract but personality inextricably bound to the small social group; relationships of ascribed status and tradition; the functional interdependence of all parts of a society, including its prejudices and superstitions; the role of the sacred in maintaining order and integration; and, above all, the primacy of society to the individual.<sup>20</sup>



The kind of community exalted by the conservative intelligentsia gave each of its members an identity:

in [the community], the tasks of work, the responsibilities of the family, the worship of the gods, and the pursuit of virtue are fused. In peasant societies throughout history, men's obligation to their work, their children, their fellows, and the Divine has been seen as a part of an indissoluble whole; and in most primitive societies even today, an intimate nexus exists between family, social obligation, work, ritual, magic, and religion. . . . In such communities, the demands of the mind, the hands and the heart are fused. The peasant does not merely work his land, he cares for it. The fisherman not only exploits the sea, but stands in awe of its ferocity and prays for its calm. The hunter not only kills the animals he hunts, he also often worships them as his highest gods. And toward his broader community, toward the other members of his village and tribe, he feels kinship based not on rational awareness of common purpose and custom, but on instinctive loyalty derived from a sense of special humanity. Many primitive communities refer to themselves merely as "the people," thus distinguishing their own special humanity. . . . Within such primary communities, what men do and what they think is a part of what they feel and what they worship: cognition, action, feeling, morality and reverence are fused.<sup>21</sup>

The radical idea of community has been somewhat different. In general, peasant or other "primitive" communities have seemed less directly available as models, although in Russia, as we shall see, the peasant commune helped the Populists imagine the social order of the future. Radical communitarians have been more reluctant to repudiate the modern concerns for individual differentiation, liberties, and well-being that have been commonplaces of liberal ideology. Often the reconciliation of communal integration with the achievements of bourgeois individualism has seemed a particular problem to communitarians of the Left. As Alexander Herzen once put it: "How is the independence of the Englishman to be kept without the cannibalism, how is the individuality of the [Russian] peasant to be developed without the loss of the principle of the commune? Precisely in this [dilemma] lies the whole agonizing problem of our century, precisely in this consists the whole [problem] of socialism."<sup>22</sup> So



left-wing seekers after "community," not surprisingly, have tended to found their own more or less "utopian" communes—of which there have been thousands, from Brook Farm to the still numerous communities in the United States at present.\*

A crucial goal of virtually all the communitarian experiments of the last one hundred fifty years has been the ending of "alienation," the "reintegration" of the shattered and fragmented faculties of modern man. However diverse the suggested *means* for overcoming alienation may be, radicals and reactionaries paint a remarkably similar picture of the hypothetical "integrated" (or reintegrated) person. Let us allow the Slavophile Ivan Kireevsky to speak for the reactionaries:

the first condition . . . is that man should strive to gather into one indivisible whole all his separate forces, which in his ordinary condition are in a state of disunity and contradiction; that he should not consider his abstract logical capacity as the only organ for the comprehension of the truth; that he should not consider the voice of ecstatic feeling, uncoordinated with the other forces of the spirit, as an infallible guide to truth; that he should not consider the inspiration of an isolated aesthetic sense, independent of other concepts, as the true guide to the comprehension of the higher order of the universe; that he should not consider even the overmastering love of his heart, separate from the other demands of the spirit, as an infallible guide to the attainment of the supreme good; but that he should constantly seek in the depths of his soul that inner root of understanding where all the separate forces fuse into one living and whole vision of the mind.<sup>23</sup>

Human reintegration, for Kireevsky, depended on the achievement of a new civilization, based both on communalism and on a profound rediscovery of the principles of Orthodox Christian-

\*An excellent picture of recent American communalism can be found in Raymond Mungo, *Total Loss Farm* (New York, 1970). Edward Shils notes that "the new 'communitarian,' 'participatory' culture . . . is really the romantic hunger for *Gemeinschaft* on a more grandiose scale." See "Dreams of Plenitude, Nightmares of Scarcity" in Seymour M. Lipset and Philip G. Altbach, eds., *Students in Revolt* (Boston, 1970), p. 18. Compare the American experience with the Russian communes established by A. N. Engel'gardt in the 1870s. See Richard Wortman, *The Crisis of Russian Populism* (Cambridge, England, 1967), pp. 47-60.



ity; the two were linked, he believed. For Karl Marx, the greatest *intelligent* of the Left, reintegration could occur only with the achievement of communism through a worldwide revolution that would abolish private property. But for Marx, as for Kireevsky, the egoism created by modern society and state was the ultimate enemy. Only under communism, according to Marx,

“does self-activity coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals and the casting off of all natural limitations.” Marx illustrates the casting off of limitations by saying that “in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.”<sup>24</sup>

The focus on reintegration and community does not exhaust the content of intelligentsia thought, but simply provides a focus for their preoccupations. Members of Left intelligentsias generally supported the main thrust of Enlightenment radicalism as the key to the good society of the future, while intelligentsia groups of the Right have gravitated toward some form of the preindustrial or “native” values of their own society as the key to the future. A certain tension arises between nationalist and internationalist attitudes in an intelligentsia, particularly if their own society is suffering from the humiliations of underdevelopment. Their view of the good society transcends, at least in part, their own national culture, and yet their own wounded sense of themselves as Russians, Chinese, or Africans spurs their criticism. Kenneth Kaunda, for example, criticized what one might call the “Faustian” strand of Western modernity in the following nativist terms: “I do believe that there is a distinctively African way of looking at things, of problem-solving, and indeed of thinking. We have our own logic system, which makes sense to us, however confusing it might be to the Westerner. The Westerner has a



problem-solving mind, while the African has a situation-experiencing mind."<sup>25</sup> When a society is developed and powerful, nationalist attitudes in its intelligentsia, like the craving for wealth and power, diminish.

In addition to its moral critique of modernity and its stress on the related themes of community and alienation, the *social isolation* of the intelligentsia has always been one of its essential characteristics. Either out of necessity or by choice, members of the intelligentsia have tended to remain apart from the established institutions of their society. Indeed, some theoreticians have gone so far as to suggest that the development of an intelligentsia is simply a function of a society's economic backwardness. A developing country, so the argument runs, inevitably produces people who are overeducated or educated inappropriately; there may be too many lawyers, for instance, in a society whose real need is for engineers. So a well-educated lawyer who is likely to be conversant with modern European culture, and in that sense "better educated" than most of his countrymen, cannot be used (or perhaps even employed at all) by his society, and for this reason is likely to become embittered and highly critical.<sup>26</sup> No one can really deny that this situation is conducive to the recruitment of an intelligentsia, but to use it as the paradigm of how intelligentsias originate leaves too much out of account. The situation in nineteenth-century Russia, where the intelligentsia originated, was rather different; nor does the simple combination of overeducation and economic backwardness explain the presence of a critical intelligentsia today in Europe (including the Soviet Union) and the United States. It seems preferable simply to note the strong inclination of an intelligentsia to live by moral ideas and to insist that, for whatever reason, members of an intelligentsia must stand somewhat apart from the institutions of their society.

Like many a convenient category, this notion of the intelligentsia gets rather blurred at the edges. Should Jonathan Swift be called an *intelligent*? Noam Chomsky? Chomsky is a brilliant and innovative theoretician in linguistics, and he is integrated

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into American society to the extent that he finds it possible to function as a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. But the primacy of moral ideals in his life and his activities as a social critic and publicist invite one to classify him as a member of the radical intelligentsia.

Finally, the social idealism of the *intelligent* is clearly not always in harmony with his aspirations toward wealth and power. Powerlessness is so important in generating the kind of criticism that intelligentsias produce that not unnaturally they often exhibit a strong ambition to achieve power, both for their society and for themselves. Indeed, in many developing societies the intelligentsia must be seen as the nucleus of a new ruling elite; their orientation toward power and away from social idealism increases as a "revolutionary situation" draws near. But in those countries (almost always economically developed) where the intelligentsia has no chance of "coming to power," the stream of social idealism tends to flow unhindered. In late Imperial Russia, the Bolsheviks were of all intelligentsia groupings the one most oriented toward the realities of seizing and exercising power; the component of social idealism was weak among them from the 1890s on. It diminished even further after 1917, when they formed a new elite; the revival of social idealism in Trotskyism was almost entirely the consequence of Trotsky's political destruction.

Just as the Bolshevik regime has generated a new intelligentsia to oppose it (*not* an intelligentsia that can be much interested in power!), it is clear that the elites of the former colonial regimes of Asia and Africa, unless they are remarkably successful in meeting the needs of their constituents, will face a new intelligentsia critique, which will be the more maximalist because of the absence of virtually all Western-style, "bourgeois" politics. Their Solzhenitsyns and Amalriks are not far down the road, although it may be that many "post revolutionary" regimes will be willing and able to employ sufficient coercion and terror to prevent an intelligentsia opposition from emerging publicly. For it seems to be the case that an intelligentsia can have a public existence only in a society where there are at least rudimentary democratic



attitudes or in a society that is unable to apply sufficient force to repress it.

One cannot tell the story of nineteenth-century Russian *intelligenty* if one is not attuned to their specific *mentalité* and to the specific problems that loomed so overwhelmingly for them: human reintegration, the burden of their parasitical culture, achieved at the expense of the *narod*. If one does not take this intellectual climate into account, their lives can seem merely extravagant, in the way that supercilious Westerners sometimes refer to as "typically Russian."

We can say in the most generalized sense that the Russian intelligentsia developed out of the gentry, following its emancipation from compulsory state service in 1762.<sup>27</sup> Crucial to its emergence was the general process of "Westernization" that Russia had been undergoing since the seventeenth century, and particularly the fact that a minority of the Westernized gentry began to feel "cramped" in Russia, to use Martin Malia's apt term.<sup>28</sup> The imperial bureaucracy provided the only outlet for their developing civic idealism, and its sluggish routines were not attractive to the most able and ambitious among them. Cut off from any "practical" political activity, they lived more and more in the realm of ideas; and the ideas among which they chose to live were Western ideas, either directly critical of existing political and social conditions—such as the ideas of the French Enlightenment—or indirectly so, as with early-nineteenth-century Romanticism.

Aleksandr Radishchev, author of the famous *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, is often referred to as the first Russian *intelligent*. His only rival for the title is Nikolai Novikov, journalist, scholar, philanthropist, and Freemason. When we observe that Radishchev was arrested in 1790 (shortly after his *Journey* was published) and that Novikov was arrested in 1792, we have a sense of how to date the beginnings of the intelligentsia.

It has often been debated whether the Decembrist rebels of 1825 were part of a Russian intelligentsia, or whether one ought to refer to them by some awkward term such as "proto-intelli-



*gent*," or whether they were not *intelligently* at all. To my way of thinking, most of the Decembrists were too deeply rooted in existing Russian society—that is, insufficiently alienated—to be so designated. But the debate is worth pursuing only for the pleasure of the thing, for intellectual exercise. It is clear that the Decembrists were *to some degree* estranged from the operations of their society, and that their criticisms had a strong moral basis, rooted in Enlightenment ideas, rather than being simply the prescriptions of concerned and practical reformers. But neither they nor Radishchev nor Novikov was conscious of belonging to some larger collectivity that served a critical function in society. Nor were they concerned with problems of "alienation" and "community," preoccupations that developed only following the massive infusion of German idealism and philosophical Romanticism into Russia between 1820 and 1848.

The reign of Nicholas I (1825–55) saw the Russian intelligentsia take on its characteristic nineteenth-century form, although the term "intelligentsia" was not actually coined until the early 1860s.<sup>29</sup> Nicholas's repressive thirty-year reign drove all critical or in any way oppositional thought out of the public arena and into intimate groups, or "circles." The dominant intellectual framework of the circles, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s, was provided by German idealism; French socialism and various forms of Romanticism and conservatism were also present in an intoxicating intellectual mix. Small wonder that the straightforward eighteenth-century radicalism (much of it very moderate) so characteristic of the Decembrists was replaced by far more ambitious and complex recipes for human liberation. The new extremism was due primarily to pressure from the regime, which regarded all independent speculation on these matters as inherently dangerous, an attitude that induced a kind of emotional radicalism in all those who were interested in social and political questions. Because the intelligentsia was deprived of any outlet or public forum, its ideas became more extreme and fantastic, unmoderated by the kind of practical experience characteristic of Western Europe. Secondly, both Romanticism and German idealism squarely posed the questions of individual alienation



and of the replacement of social rationalism (particularly in its Manchesterian form) with some new form of human community. The socialism of the Saint-Simonians and Charles Fourier was also concerned with these issues; in fact the socialism and Romanticism of 1830 had a good deal in common. So, under considerable pressure from the state, and with the bewildering intellectual riches of nineteenth-century Europe as their major resource, a coherent set of problems and a sense of group identity emerged for the extremely small minority of *obshchestvo* that concerned themselves with the realm of ideas. Their provincial isolation from the "metropolitan" centers—Paris and Berlin—only heightened the passion with which they lived and suffered through these ideas.

Between 1840 and 1848, the least repressive period of Nicholas's reign, the discussions of the intelligentsia emerged somewhat from the salons and found at least a veiled expression in journals and magazines. It is at this point that we can perceive a division between the "radical" and "reactionary" intelligentsia positions. The "radicals" were christened "Westerners" by their opponents,\* and although the designation was intended pejoratively, it was accepted as a badge of honor. The Westerners—who included Alexander Herzen, the literary critic Vissarion Belinsky, the historian Timofei Granovsky—were visionaries of the same stamp as the Left Hegelians in Germany. They saw history moving dialectically through ever higher stages to a new civilization that would reconcile individualism and community (in a national form) and bestow its blessings on those segments of the population that had hitherto remained outside of historical development altogether. Whether the final achievement of this new civilization would be a matter of evolution or revolution was a question about which individual Westerners might differ, but on the general nature of the process they were agreed. Thus, in their Hegelian scheme, the conquest of true individuality and

\*I am oversimplifying the category here. Certain of those who were known as "Westerners" were neither Hegelian nor interested in socialism. Pëtr Chaadaev, for example, was determinedly Romantic and antimodern in his orientation. But because the focus of his traditionalism was Rome and the Mediterranean world, rather than "Old Russia," he was considered a Westerner.



community lay at the end of history and was linked with a deeper and fuller triumph of "reason," rather than its repudiation. Hence, the Westerners in the 1840s were not backward-looking and had little nostalgia for earlier forms of social life, particularly in Russia, which they regarded as only having begun to emerge from an ahistorical slumber and stagnation at the time of Peter the Great.<sup>30</sup>

Although the Slavophiles—Russia's "reactionary" *intelligenty*—were likewise obsessed by the achievement of personal reintegration within a true communal order, their approach to the problem was quite different. Although Ivan Kireevsky was touched by French socialist thought and both he and Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov knew their Hegel and Schelling well, their greatest intellectual debt was to the Romantic conservatism of the Restoration period in Germany. The Slavophiles looked to pre-Petrine Muscovy, whose civilization and culture they substantially distorted to create a historical existence for their religious and social ideals. They regarded what they called "Old Russia" as a network of local communities, deeply Christian and profoundly traditional, without a Roman sense of private property and without "individualism" in the modern sense. Law and custom were virtually identical. They claimed that the Russian monarchy—until the destructive introduction of modern, rationalizing, "Western" ideas—had an extremely limited function: it conducted foreign relations on behalf of the entire collectivity, and the Tsar served as a supreme, paternal judge. The contrasting typologies of Old Russian and Western civilizations in the Slavophile formulations are close to those of Romantic theoreticians and early sociologists, the classic expression of which is probably to be found in Ferdinand Tönnies's contrast between community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*).<sup>31</sup> But in the work of the Slavophiles, this contrast between premodern integration and modern alienation took a national form: in Russia the communal and religious culture had been preserved in an undeveloped form in the way of life of the *narod*, and in the West it had been lost altogether.

The fact that the Slavophiles grotesquely distorted early Rus-



sian history, although easy enough to demonstrate, is fundamentally beside the point. They were not historians but intelligentsia critics whose interest was really in the present and future. They, quite as much as the Westerners, were critics of the Russian autocracy, which in its violent, sporadic, and often inefficient way had been the principal vehicle for modernizing Russia, at least from the time when Peter the Great had replaced the Tsar by the Emperor. The Slavophiles' fundamental preoccupations were very close to those of the Westerners—which helps to explain the intense love-hate relationship between the two groups, as well as some reciprocal influence. But the Slavophiles had even more difficulty than the Westerners in plausibly suggesting how their ideals might be implemented. That Russia might return to such a version of its national past in shaping its contemporary life seemed even more farfetched than the notion that Russia might soon witness the triumph of historical Reason, in either evolutionary or revolutionary form.

After 1847-48, the bipolarity of the intelligentsia began to change. Belinsky died and Herzen emigrated, and very quickly the Westerner position became fragmented. The Slavophiles were only slightly more unified, and without the Westerner "enemy" to encounter in the salons of Moscow and the pages of journals, their group existence became less important. Not until the development of what came to be called Populism (*narodnichestvo*) was a significant proportion of the intelligentsia able to develop an intellectual focus for their criticisms of Russian society.